

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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Creating an Elevator Speech

COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

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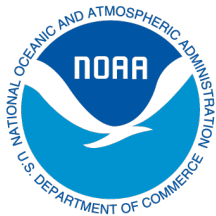
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LET'S EAT GRANDMA.
LET'S EAT, GRANDMA.
COMMAS SAVE LIVES.

September 2018, Issue 1



TIP OF THE MONTH

CREATING AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

How do you quickly tell your organization's story? This can be a surprisingly hard task.

For people not in our line of work, explaining my organization, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management, can be way hard. If I'm at a party and someone asks, I'll say "NOAA—you know, the people who bring you the weather."

That short statement is filled with an amazing amount of half-truths. But in this setting, I'm responding to what I perceive is the audience's interest level. They want to know the equivalent of the foam on a latte—nothing really heavy. And that's what I'm giving them.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

The road to developing an elevator speech starts where all good PR projects do—understanding your audience, and figuring out what they are interested in. Let your reply match the audience's interest in terms of what you choose to emphasize and how much detail you provide. **DO NOT BASE YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH ON WHAT YOU WANT THE AUDIENCE TO KNOW.** (Should I say that again, or do the caps drive the point home well enough?)

Frank Ruopoli, the graphic designer in our office, has a buddy he goes camping with. This guy works for a local wildlife organization, and he does research. Frank says he's sure the guy does interesting work, but once he gets started talking, he goes on and on. When he gets wound up, people start retiring to their tents, one by one. This guy has not read his audience.

KEEPING IT REAL

But one thing we can commend Mr. Wildlife Camper on is his enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the secret sauce that makes an elevator speech sing. Forget crafting a formal elevator speech that gives every part of your organization its rightful due. What is it that you are passionate about and that you feel your audience will relate to? Enthusiasm sells. An emotional appeal will outsell facts and figures any day of the week.

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Depending on your audience, of course, a casual elevator speech for a research reserve might start with, “I work at the coolest place! Have you heard of it? We protect hundreds of acres of marsh and we have lots of programs for the public. Won’t you come visit some time? I’d love to show you around.”

For a coastal zone management program, don’t you just want to burst with pride that your job is so important to coastal communities and the environment? What could possibly be better than that?

YOU CAN DO THIS

One of the best speakers in our organization is Dave Stein. Dave is an encyclopedia for his subject matter (Marine Cadastre—how’s that for a topic!). But when he gives a presentation, he only hits the highlights, almost never uses jargon (nobody’s perfect), and focuses on impacts and end results instead of the how. When someone asks a question, Dave is ready. He can go deep quickly and always impresses people with his knowledge about the subject matter. But his approach is successful because he lets the audience lead the conversation. His enthusiasm, his emphasis on impacts, and his plain speak approach hook the listener. Because he lets the rest of the conversation flow based on audience questions, the effort is focused on what the audience wants to hear; he does not try to force-feed what he thinks the audience should be interested in. (Taking that force-feeding approach, by the way, is just plain rude. And ineffective.)

So what have we learned thus far?

- Focus on what the audience wants to know, and their level of interest.
- Be enthusiastic. Use simple language. Be concise.
- Don’t tell everything you know. Talk about impacts, not how something was done.
- Let the audience lead the conversation through their questions.

OKAY, SO NOW WHAT DO I DO?

Practice. Writing down some thoughts to have in your back pocket is always a good idea, but nothing beats practice. In fact, it’s probably best to practice first,

off the cuff, and then write down your best responses. For some reason, most people do a great job talking, but when it comes to writing, and they go all bureaucratic on me. (But I’m not complaining—job security and all that.) So have a nice conversation, then write down the witty things that effortlessly came out of your mouth.

Here’s a great way to get practice and feedback. At your next staff meeting, consider putting a bunch of situations in a hat. Divide up in pairs, or maybe three per team, and give each person a situation. Play out the scenario for a minute or two, and provide feedback to each other. You can address either what you do for a living, where you work, the issues facing your organization, whatever. Sample situations include

- You see your long-lost cousin at a family reunion.
- You are sitting on a plane next to your congressman.
- The mayor and his kids are participating in a program at your organization.
- A NOAA official visits and you are giving a tour.
- A TV camera is pointed at your face.
- A neighbor wants to know what you do and where you work.
- You are in an elevator and the guy from the insurance office next door asks about your office.
- A congressman or state official visits your office and says “what can I do for you?”

Note: That last one is particularly important. Our elected officials want to help our programs, but during their visits, I often hear lots of talk, but rarely an ask, or a heads up about an issue. Give them something to add to their platform! Let them know what kind of help you can offer up to address local needs. Use this situation to make a friend. At the very least, don’t let them be surprised about upcoming events or situations.

Good luck!

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COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

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Organization: Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve

Location: Port Aransas, Texas



Organizational Structure

The managing agency is the University of Texas Marine Science Institute. I am the communications coordinator for the Marine Science Institute, and the research reserve works very closely with the institute, maintaining offices on campus. Several staff members' duties are split among both. The structure is set up with core coordinators, each having two to three staff members on their team, and each having clearly defined roles.

Outreach Approach

Outreach is primarily handled by the reserve manager (the social media interface at the reserve) and the Marine Science Institute communications coordinator (that's me!). I work with staff to issue press releases, newsletters, and the Marine Science Institute website and social media.

Job Duties

I handle all outreach for the Marine Science Institute, from newsletters to video presentations for our advisory council to working with FEMA, as well as information needs related to Hurricane Harvey. Right now, I'm working on hurricane information and trying to fit in media preparation for the advisory council.

Social Media

The reserve manager and I handle social media tasks. We have had lots of success using video for media outreach, and anything related to people, such as awards and graduations.

Most Fun, Most Challenging

I like writing press releases about science. The most challenging is dealing with logos and issues of recognition.

Sally's Work Mantra

My professional mantra is to make outreach effective while focusing on science and imparting why it is important.

Wish for the Future

I would love to have the time to work more with video.

FROM US TO YOU

NOAA OUTREACH PRODUCTS

Top Ten Series. Developed to help officials talk about various programs and topics, this two-pager also makes a great handout. Topics covered thus far include the National Coastal Zone Management Program, Digital Coast, and Marine Cadastre. Contact us at coastal.info@noaa.gov to get a copy.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) and tag along with these campaigns.

- September 10-14 use #Pacific to see stories and resources for the Pacific
- September 15-22 use #EstuariesWeek for National Estuaries Week updates
- September 24-28 use #HighTideFlooding to see resources to mitigate high tide flooding

CROWDSOURCING: PLEASE PARTICIPATE!

Help us keep this newsletter relevant. Send in your questions and topic requests to coastal.info@noaa.gov and provide comments about subjects covered. We will use this information to develop future issues.

Reader Request: A reader from Delaware is looking for fresh ideas on how best to engage the public at community events, particularly when it comes to setting up a display table. Please send in your thoughts, which we will compile for a future issue. Thanks!

FAST FACTS: COASTAL ECONOMICS

This is one of many graphics and fast facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/economics-and-demographics.



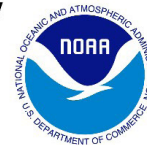
America's Coasts

40% of the population, **10%** of the land mass

\$8.3 trillion in goods and services annually

55.8 million employed

\$3.4 trillion in wages annually



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Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

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